

2014 Junior Olympic Champion Throwing: Emelda Malm-Annan



Mike Curry remembers the first time Emelda Malm-Annan tried to throw the hammer.

“She nearly wrapped it around her neck,” said Curry, head coach of Golden State Throwers, a Sacramento-area club.

It’s perfectly understandable for a novice to have a hard time controlling the iron ball on the end of a wire chain, but Malm-Annan has a slightly different recollection.

“I felt like I was going to fall down, but it was fun,” she said. “You get to spin around.”

Barely one year after throwing the hammer for the first time, the Monterey Trail High School senior has made head-spinning progress. In late July, Malm-Annan won the 17-18 age division at the National Junior Olympic Track & Field Championships in Humble, Texas. She threw a personal-best 158 feet, 2 inches, winning by more than six feet.

The hammer is not contested at the high school level in California. (Rhode Island is the only state that officially sanctions the event.) Malm-Annan was competing in the shot put and discus when Curry, a former hammer thrower at Humboldt State, spotted her at a high school meet and approached her about joining his Golden State Throwers club in May 2013.

“I could see that Emelda was extremely athletic – someone who could be brought up to be a really good discus thrower and hammer thrower.” Curry said.

Throwing from a makeshift cage Curry built in Elk Grove, Malm-Annan improved steadily during her first summer as a hammer thrower, reaching 112-7 to place second at the 2013 Pacific Association Junior Olympics. In the winter of her junior year, she traveled to Pocatello, Idaho, for the Simplot Games, where she finished fourth in the weight throw with a toss of 48-9¾.

After a relatively undistinguished high school season, Malm-Annan improved dramatically this past summer. At the Golden West Invitational at Sacramento State, she won the hammer (152-0) and was fourth in the discus (128-2).

She extended her hammer best to 156-3 in winning the Pacific Association Junior Olympics in Livermore and capped a breakthrough summer with her victory at the National Junior Olympics in Texas. At the national meet, she produced three throws farther than the best mark of the runner-up.

Since then, Malm-Annan has received feelers from South Florida, Duke, Cal State Northridge, Oberlin, Cornell and Sacramento State, among other colleges.

“A coach at UC Davis told me that if you can produce female throwers, particularly in the hammer, there are a lot of opportunities,” Curry said. “Scholarships are going unclaimed because colleges can’t find quality female hammer throwers. Emelda is going to have a lot of opportunities. We fully expect her to throw 190 feet next year.”

While the California Interscholastic Federation prohibits the hammer from being contested in high school events, ostensibly due to safety concerns, the state has produced a number of Olympians and national-class throwers thanks largely to the hammer legend Ed Burke.

Curry first met Burke, a former U.S. record-holder and three-time Olympian, in 1984. Today, Curry’s Golden State Throwers carry on the legacy established by Burke’s Explorer is an outgrowth of the Explorer Post 813 club Burke and Olympic discus champion Mac Wilkins established in the 1980s.

One of Burke’s protégés, 1996 Olympian Dave Popejoy, assists Curry with the Golden State group. Stephanie Trafton Brown, the 2008 Olympic champion in the discus, also assists when she has the time.

“I scout athletes at the local high school meets, looking for boys and girls with throwing potential,” Curry said. “I pay attention to how they treat their teammates and their parents before I even approach them. I make sure that they have at least a 3.0 grade point average. I could see from the start that Emelda did everything right.”

Since getting back from the Junior Olympics, Malm-Annan has been using the standard three turns in the hammer ring. The extra turn makes a big difference.

“I’m throwing 20 feet farther with three turns,” Malm-Annan said. “I want to throw 200 feet before I get out of high school. That’s my goal. I like the fact that you control the hammer. If you put a lot of speed and aggression into it, you can really launch it. I’m strong and quick. I can get going pretty fast.”

For now, playing volleyball for the Monterey Trail varsity and keeping up with her school work occupies much of the 5-foot-9 senior’s time. Malm-Annan is itching to get back in the ring and find out where an obscure event with origins extending four thousand years back to ancient Ireland might wind up taking her.

“I’m very grateful,” she said. “I’d never be in this position if I hadn’t found the hammer.”